

SECTION 8 – MAJOR STORM RESPONSE

This section is specifically intended for those persons whose permit authorizes them to **conduct nesting surveys** and provides instructions in the event of a major storm (greater than 30 mph winds or a category 1 hurricane). It provides some additional information about what might happen on your beach after the storm.

1. **Your safety** - The safety of our staff and volunteers are our top priority. Please make sure you are safe! Do not risk your safety or wellbeing in order to conduct any of the turtle-related activities outlined below. Stay off the beach during a storm event. Please comply with all mandatory evacuation orders and take time to ensure that your family and personal property are secure.
2. **Protecting your nests** – If possible, get the best GPS coordinates you can on any nests that remain on the beach after the storm. Placing additional stakes in the dunes is also a good idea whenever possible. While the SCDNR guidelines do not allow you to dig up nests to move the eggs or release hatchlings before natural emergence, you can respond to any nests that are washing away by reburying the eggs on the beach (not in buckets or other containers!!) if there is any dry beach left.
3. **Nest inventories/excavations** - Conducting nest inventories early because of approaching storms is not permitted. While it may seem counterintuitive, data collected from early excavations is not useful because it provides a skewed picture of what the hatch and emergence success of that nest truly was. Yes, storms have an impact on sea turtles, but they have adapted their nesting strategy to accommodate for natural events such as hurricanes. Each nesting female turtle deposits several nests throughout the duration of the nesting season - essentially hedging her bets to make sure that even if a storm hits at some point during the nesting season, there is still a high probability that at least a few of her nests will incubate successfully without being impacted by a storm. No storm season is a total loss for sea turtles.
4. **Eggs** - We know that members of the public have been bringing eggs they found on the beach to some of you. You may accept these eggs (and then promptly bury them back on the beach), but be sure to educate the folks dropping them off that these eggs are most likely not going to produce hatchlings. We do not want to encourage people to be salvaging non-viable eggs or digging up viable nests. People want to help the turtles, so encourage them to help turtles through other mechanisms that will actually contribute to the preservation and protection of the populations. If you are a facility or a permit holder that does not conduct nesting surveys and are brought eggs, please coordinate

the reburial of the eggs with the local permit holders. No one should be incubating eggs at a facility, home, or office - no permit allows this activity.

5. **Post-storm recovery** - Typically the activities that will be authorized under an emergency order from the Governor and SCDHEC OCRM include immediate efforts to shore up homes or roads that have been damaged – replacing pilings, adding structural support, as well as sand placement. State and federal laws protecting marine turtles are still in effect! Loggerheads may continue to try to nest on these beaches after the storm. Nests cannot be relocated for these emergency activities, but they can and should be marked clearly to reduce the potential for negative impacts. If there is a federal action, we might be able to work with the USFWS to allow nest relocation in some areas. Again, such relocation would have to be completed by 9 am the next morning. Do not relocate anything unless approved by SCDNR! Attempts to locate nests whose stakes have been washed out would be helpful to further decrease potential impacts from activities aimed at shoring up the coast, especially sand placement.
6. **Debris removal** – This activity may also be allowed under a state emergency order – heavy equipment will be everywhere! If you are able to get onto the beach, do the best you can to mark and protect nests. While we do not expect you to be involved in regulatory actions, we will support your efforts to protect nests on your beach.
7. **Armoring** - Sea walls, rocks, and geotubes **cannot** be installed under the state emergency order. Local governments can allow installation of **TEMPORARY** armoring structures **IF** they declare an emergency and issue permits for such structures. Regulations concerning emergency orders can be found on SCDHEC OCRM's web site.
8. **Coordination** - We will direct anyone doing anything on the beach to coordinate with the local Permit Holder after receiving authorization from OCRM. They should not access the beach each day before surveys are done (if you are still surveying).
9. **Structures** - Walkovers, decks, and other such non-essential structures cannot be installed under an emergency order. Unless OCRM has coordinated with SCDNR and allowed the work to proceed (usually because no additional nesting is occurring and existing nests have been lost), no such work should be ongoing on your beaches until after nesting season.